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ABSTRACT

A state-wide survey based on a representative sampling of members of the 89th General Assembly was conducted to explore attitudes concerning the quality of education in Tennessee. Areas covered by the survey included the attitudes of the General Assembly members toward teachers, teachers' salaries, and age of retirement. The survey was designed around eighteen questions with additional space for comments. Questions covered a range of relevant topics such as "Do you favor graduate school programs in Tennessee?"; "Do you favor a comprehensive school system for each county in Tennessee?"; and "Do you think that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised?" The questions were intended to discern opinions and attitudes from the members rather than elicit information based on factual knowledge. A general agreement was reached suggesting that education today is considered "better" by a substantial number of respondents. Consensus among respondents indicated that too much emphasis is being placed on higher education. Respondents also agreed that the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee is the home environment of the child, that teacher education curriculum should be revised, and that school board members should have at least twelve years of formal education. (JN)

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SURVEY OF THE 89TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THEIR ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF TENNESSEE

Research Paper

by

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and

Summary and Presentation to the Fifth Annual Meeting
of the Mid-South Educational Research Association
in New Orleans in November, 1976

by

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SP 017 071

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey of the 89th General Assembly of their attitudes and opinions toward public education in Tennessee would not have been possible for me to have conducted and the information obtained herein, if I had not had the help of Representative Shelby A. Rhinehart (D), 37th District.

Mr. Rhinehart endorsed my questionnaire. In many instances when the questionnaires were not returned by mail, Mr. Rhinehart contacted these members by telephone and personally asked them for their opinions and attitudes.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank the twenty-three Senators and sixty-five Representatives who took the time to answer the questions and give their very informative comments. My sincere heartfelt thanks goes to each one of them.

August, 1975 Joyce Y. Grissom

INTRODUCTION

Progress is only possible when the people are properly informed and when they are ready through their tax dollar, to bear the costs of progress. For these reasons, this survey has been directed toward appraising the General Assembly's knowledge and ascertaining their attitudes toward present practices, readiness to accept and continue new programs and their ideas for meeting educational costs.

Public education in Tennessee is passing through a trying period. No one needs to be reminded that forty million dollars was cut from the State's proposed budget this year (1975-76). The proposed budget of Education was cut 16 million dollars. Higher education was cut substantially. Six million was cut from the budget, although it was not a part of the Education budget proposed by the Governor for direct grants to students attending public and private colleges and universities. Grades K-12 also received cuts. The kindergarten capital outlay program was cut 8 million dollars. The reading program of $3,550,000 which was funded in 1974 was deleted from the budget.[1]

All of the above cuts and deletions from the budget of public education will affect the quality of education in the State of Tennessee.

[1]Schedules of Budget Proposals, reductions and comparisons of Senate-House Conference Committee, 89th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, 1975.

Nevertheless, respect for and confidence in the public schools, this peculiarly American institution, remains at a high level.[2]

[2]Stanley Elam (ed.), "The First Five Years: Trends and Observations," The Gallup Polls of Attitudes Toward Education 1969-1973 (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, Inc.), p. 1.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this survey reported in the following paper, is to measure and record the attitudes of the 89th General Assembly toward Public Education in the year 1975.

The survey is state-wide in scope and based upon a representative sample of all the members of the 89th General Assembly.

Since attitudes and knowledge are closely related, many questions asked of the respondents were included for the purpose of measuring the kind and amount of information possessed by representative members regarding their state's education system.

An important objective of the study was to learn how the typical member of the 89th General Assembly judges the quality of education in the State of Tennessee - the criteria they use in arriving at a judgement as to the excellence - or lack of it.

A realistic measure of the 89th General Assembly's attitude toward education in Tennessee is the unwillingness to vote tax increases when there is need for greater financial assistance.

Other areas covered in the present survey deal with attitudes of the General Assembly's toward teachers, their salaries, age of retirement, the teaching profession, and toward their local school boards, higher education, the community school and the tenure law in Tennessee.

The public is demanding better use of the tax dollar. The General Assembly are representatives of the public. Many of them are taking a long hard look at education, trying to access if monies appropriated are being spent wisely and if the public is getting their money's worth.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This survey is limited to eighteen questions asked and comments given by members of the 89th General Assembly. It does not show how to go about solving the problems of education in Tennessee. It was merely designed to find out the opinions and attitudes of these members on public education in the State of Tennessee.

INSTRUMENTS USED

The following cover letter and questionnaire was sent to all the members of the 89th General Assembly, consisting of 33 Senators and 99 Representatives.

SHELBY A. RHINEHART
REPRESENTATIVE
BLEDSOE, MARION, SEQUATCHIE
VAN BUREN, PART OF WARREN COUNTIES

P. O. BOX 128
SPENCER, TENNESSEE 38585

House of Representatives
State of Tennessee

NASHVILLE

VICE-CHAIRMAN
FINANCE, WAYS AND MEANS
MEMBER OF COMMITTEES
CALENDAR AND RULES
EDUCATION
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

June 10, 1975

TO: All Members
89th General Assembly

FROM: Shelby A. Rhinehart

In conjunction with Joyce Grissom, a graduate student at Tennessee Technological University, we are conducting a survey of the attitudes and opinions of the 89th General Assembly toward Public Education in the State of Tennessee.

I assure you that your answers to the questions and any comments that you may want to make will be used in a confidential manner.

Please answer the questions listed on the enclosed questionnaire and return them to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your early reply will be appreciated.

A copy of the results of this study will be made available to you if you so desire.

Thank you for taking time to participate in the study.

SAR/b
Enclosures

SURVEY OF THE 89TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THEIR ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF TENNESSEE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer Yes or No and Comment if you wish.

1. Do you believe that the quality of education has improved in Tennessee over the past 10 years?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

2. Do you think that the taxpayers of Tennessee are getting their money's worth for the amount of money now being spent on education in the State of Tennessee?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

3. Is too much emphasis now being placed on higher education?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

4. Should the taxpayers of Tennessee subsidize private colleges through student grants?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

5. Do you favor the graduate school programs in Tennessee?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

6. Which of the four things listed do you think has been the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee?
   Poor quality teachers____ Busing____ Home Environment_____
   Compulsary Attendance_____ Comment_____

7. Do you think that the $3,800,000 appropriation for special reading program approved for the year 74-75 was wisely spent?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

8. Do you think it will require an additional tax to fully implement the Vocational School Program in Tennessee?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

9. Do you favor one comprehensive school system for each county in Tennessee?
   Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

10. Are you familiar with the Community School concept?
    Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____
    If yes, are you in favor of financing one for Tennessee?
    Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

11. What do you think is a fair salary for a teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Tennessee? $8,000___ $10,000___ $12,000___ More than_____ Less than_____
Comment_____

12. Do you think salaries for teachers in K-12 should be brought in line with those in higher education?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

13. Do you think that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

14. Do you think that the Commissioner of Education should be elected by the people in the State of Tennessee?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

15. Do you think that school board members should have a minimum of 12 years of school?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

16. Do you think that school superintendents should be appointed by the school board?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

17. Should the tenure law in Tennessee be repealed?
Yes_____ No_____ Comment_____

18. At what age should a teacher be required to retire?
55 years_____ 60 years_____ 65 Years_____
Comments_____

COMPILATION OF FINDINGS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

RECEIVED FROM THE SENATORS

Questionnaires received from 23 of 33 Senators (70%).

1. Do you believe that the quality of education has improved in Tennessee over the past 10 years?
   Yes 18 No 5

   Comments: "No, ACT scores support this."
   "Debat able"
   "Not compared with Texas or other progressive states."
   "No, quanity."
   "Doubtful"
   "Still inadequate, teacher pupil ratio too high."

2. Do you think that the taxpayers of Tennessee are getting their money's worth for the amount of money now being spent on education in the State of Tennessee?
   Yes 12 No 11

   Comments: "Never when managed by the government."
   "With reservation."
   "Should be spent more wisely especially for K-12 teachers."
   "Teacher-pupil ratio should be lowered and more Guidance Counselors added."
   "I feel that more emphasis should be put on the basic skills."
   "Education has come a long way, I feel that it is presently inadequate."
   "Need to increase teacher salaries to induce the better high school student to major in education."
   "Teacher-pupil ratio should be lowered."
   "Decrease teacher-student ratio."

3. Is too much emphasis now being placed on higher education?
   Yes 14 No 9

   Comments: "Definitely."
   "Technical background is important, but management needs graduates."
   "Some are educated beyond their intelligence."
   "Program should be made harder so that a B.S. Degree would mean something."

"More than Grades K-12."
"Yes, when Mini Domes are being built at East Tennessee University and Professors are equipping their offices with $14,000.00 worth of furniture at M.T.S.U., then too much emphasis is being placed on higher education."
"Some universities are too large. We should concentrate on Junior Colleges."
"Yes, in a few rare cases."
"Too much money being spent."

4. Should the taxpayers of Tennessee subsidize private colleges through student grants?
Yes 12 No 9 No Answer 2

Comments: "Mixed emotions."
"Yes, more for money than State Universities."
"Unconstitutional."
"Cost less than public colleges."

5. Do you favor the graduate school programs in Tennessee?
Yes 18 No 3 No Answer 2

Comments: "Not familiar with them."
"Overemphasized."
"In most cases."
"This program is being overemphasized."
"Not familiar with the programs."
"Advanced programs are deficient."
"There is no ideal program."
"The program is now adequate."
"Not completely."
"Depending on the field of study."
"Only to the extent needed for professional persons."
"Too much competition between schools."

6. Which of the four things listed do you think has been the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee?
Poor quality teachers 3 Busing 6
Home Environment 14 Compulsory Attendance 0
Other 0

7. Do you think that the $3,800,000.00 appropriation for special reading program approved for the year 74-75 was wisely spent?
Yes 13 No 10

If your answer was No, please comment on how the reading program should be approached. 0

Comments:
"Thrown away."
"Value was not received."
"Only if continued."
"Not enough money available."
"Not used properly."
"Should have been left up to the local systems."

8. Do you think it will require an additional tax to fully implement the Vocational School Program in Tennessee?
Yes 8 No 15
If Yes, how do you propose to raise the additional funds? *

Comments:
"I strongly approve of this program."
"I feel this program is sound where statistics reflect need."
"This program should be fully funded and have priority even over kindergarten."
"This program helps to prevent out-migration."
"First the vocational school concept should be changed to have vocational schools in conjunction with each high school."
"In any way possible this is long over due since many students are more interested in this than the classics."
"Vocational schools are very important, students must train in skills. However, making a living is not enough - making a life is more important."
"If it requires more money, it should be discontinued."
"Pilot plan should have been used."

9. Do you favor one comprehensive school system for each county in Tennessee?
Yes 15 No 7 No answer 1

Comments:
"If feasible."
"Where practical."
"If possible and funds are available."
"If funds are available."
"Yes, 147 school systems too many."

* In answer to the second question: Sales Tax - Cut back on other programs not needed.

10. Are you familiar with the Community School concept?
Yes 14 No 7 No answer 2
If yes, are you in favor of financing one for Tennessee?
Yes 10 No 1 No answer 12

Comments: "Yes, I visited the Community School in Flint, Michigan. It is great for complete community involvement."

11. What do you think is a fair salary for a teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Tennessee?
$8,000. 0 $10,000. 13 $12,000. 8
More than 2 Less than 0

Comments: "Quality should be recognized."

12. Do you think salaries for teachers in grades K-12 should be brought in line with those in higher education?
Yes 16 No 7

Comments: "Yes, if the same qualifications are met."
"Only if the teacher has the same degree of training."
"Provided they have the same training."
"Only if their training is equal to those teachers in higher education."
"Higher education should be lower than grades K-12."
"Higher education requires higher degrees."
"Can't stand what we are paying now."
"Yes, with the same education."
"If the same qualifications are met."
"College salaries should be reduced."
"Yes, if requirements are the same."

13. Do you think that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised?
Yes 20 No 1 No answer 2

Comments: "More method courses."
"The Summer program should be broadened so that a degree could be granted in all cases within three years."
"No more than what is presently being done by the universities."
"Not through legislative process."
"May not be adequate in changing times."

14. Do you think that the Commissioner of Education should be elected by the people?
Yes 13 No 10

Comments: None

15. Do you think that school board members should have a minimum of 12 years of school?
Yes 18 No 5

Comments: "Yes, but it doesn't mean everything."
"It's up to the people."

16. Do you think that school Superintendents should be appointed by the school board?
Yes 13 No 9 No answer 1

Comments: "Good points both ways."
"Yes, elected board."
"Should be left to judgement of each County."

17. Should the tenure law in Tennessee be repealed?
Yes 9 No 8 No answer 6

Comments: "Only if replaced with adequate safeguards for teachers."
"Amended."
"The need no longer exists."
"Only protects poor quality teachers."
"Classification should be used along with it."
"No, qualified."

18. At what age should a teacher be required to retire in Tennessee?
55 years 0 60 years 4 65 years 15 No answer 4

Comments: "Ability should be considered more than age."
"65 years or 30 years experience."
"65 years under the present retirement system."
"Depends on the teacher."
"Depends on the ability rather than the age."
"Age is important, but ability is the greatest point to be looked at on this subject."
"Depends on teacher."
"Provision should be made so a teacher could retire with a certain number of years served."
"65 years with an adequate retirement program."

COMPILATION OF FINDINGS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

RECEIVED FROM THE REPRESENTATIVES

Questionnaires received from 65 of 99 Representatives (66%).

1. Do you believe that the quality of education has improved in Tennessee over the past 10 years?
Yes 46 No 15 No answer 4

Comments: "Yes, because it is becoming more involved in individualized differences and meeting needs."
"Doubtful."
"Broader curriculums are a great improvement, but overall standards have been lowered in my opinion - due to a lot of reasons."
"Yes, it is my opinion that the quality of education has improved greatly over the last decade."
"Maybe state wide. Not in Memphis K-12, and not at Memphis State. K-6 is improving fast. M.S.U. is not improving because every dummy in the state goes there."
"Yes. But in Memphis since busing began the quality has started to go down."
"No. Each year high school graduate scores are less on intelligence tests nation wide."
"No. Should go back to basic education."
"In less urban areas and those not affected by severe desegregation orders, yes; otherwise, no."
"No. I feel that it has deteriorated."

2: Do you think that the taxpayers of Tennessee are getting their money's worth for the amount of money now being spent on education in the State of Tennessee?
Yes 31 No 29 No answer 5

Comments: "Need physical improvements - know of one school that doesn't even have a water fountain."
"Several systems are guilty of allowing waivers on teachers not having adequate requirements - teacher pupil ratio too high."
"Program should be revised to give more emphasis on basic skills."
"Need a method of rewarding good teachers."
"Inadequacies in program - basic problems are: quality of education produced."

"Pupil-Teacher ratio too large for quality education."
"Curriculum should be revised."
"Budget presently inadequate to do the job."
"Money for kindergarten should be used to reduce classroom size and raise teachers' salaries."
"Too much administrative cost."
"No, basically because of the built-in inefficiencies in education in Tennessee - like too many public school districts. I think individual teachers do a good job with what they have."
"Not adequate - teacher-pupil ratio too high."
"Too much overlapping of programs."
"New techniques should be used in management procedures."
"Cut out aides and supervisors - use monies more effectively."

3. Is too much emphasis being placed on higher education?
Yes 39 No 24 No answer 2

Comments: "I am for higher education but we must not forget elementary and secondary - must be tops to prepare students for higher education."
"Not overall, but certain programs and staffing, yes. There is a great need for more technical and vocational post-graduate education."
"We should place emphasis (much) on all phases of education - I feel some emphasis has switched to Vocational Education."
"Undecided. Some areas, yes. Some areas, no."
"The emphasis are good but we are spending too much money."
"Too much control by higher education, yes."
"Should be re-evaluated."
"It is my opinion that perhaps several years ago a greater emphasis was placed on higher education but the pendulum has swung back to the other end toward K-12."
"Starting to de-emphasize with vocational program."
"According to final rewards, over emphasized."
"Too much emphasis on quanity instead of quality."
"No, it is very necessary."
"No! But not enough on K-12, especially K-3."

4. Should the taxpayers of Tennessee subsidize private colleges through student grants?
Yes 40 No 25 No answer 0

Comments: "Yes, if we can pay for it without robbing other areas."
"Yes, with reservations - the program was started and we should not leave those participating students out on the limb."
"Yes, however, not as it is now handled. I think it should be a loan repayable, this would be continuing."
"I am in support of the program, but only if public education, which is the State's first responsibility, is first adequately funded."
"Only for those who were already participating in the program."
"Yes, I feel though a portion should be given back. I am against give-aways."
"Yes - for those who are now in school (in principle, no). I favor a loan program and/or scholarships - (something for something)."
"Yes (but would favor some type of re-payment 3-5 years after graduating)."
"Absolutely not."
"Yes, if the funds to support it are reasonably available."
"Helps the poor."
"Violates the constitution."

5. Do you favor the graduate school programs in Tennessee?
Yes 44 No 6 No answer 15

Comments: "Veterinary medicine should be included."
"Too much emphasis on degree which has no bearing on ability."
"Some areas of certification involve too much duplication."
"Only in programs where absolutely necessary teachers should have more training inservice rather than more college."
"Adequate in most areas, need more medical training, veterinary schools, etc."
"Yes. Depending on the field of study."
"Yes. To some extent."

"Depending on programs involved."
"Yes. With less duplication in each unit."
"Yes. To a less degree than now."
"Yes. Seems to have an adequate variety."
"Should be curtailed in some fields."
"Yes. In some areas not all."
"Yes. If the veterinary program is included."
"Yes. Some should be eliminated."

6. Which of the four things listed do you think has been the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee?
Poor quality teachers 0 Busing 19
Home environment 45 Compulsory attendance 0
Other (see comments)

Comments: "Not enough money to do the job."
"All of these about the same."
"Not enough tax base."
"Not enough money."
"Built-in inefficiencies in the structure of public education in Tennessee."
"Poor pay."
"

7. Do you think that the $3,800,000. appropriation for special reading approved for the year 74-75 was wisely spent?
Yes 39 No 23 No answer 3

Comments: "Yes. It was working very well in Knox County."
"Money should be used to lower pupil teacher ratio."
"Too much went to administrative cost."
"I think education should have had a larger hand in outlining the program when the law was adopted."
"No. I see no reason why we should have to go back and teach reading over. It should be done in the beginning."
"Yes. I believe the Reading Program is a step in the right direction in solving some of our early learning problems and was worth continuing in order to see if the program would be successful."
"I think we need more qualified instructors. Too much money until we have better qualified teachers."
"I feel that the Reading Program is one of the most important programs that we have."

8. Do you think it will require an additional tax to fully implement the vocational school program in Tennessee?
Yes 10 No 50 No answer 5

If Yes, how do you propose to raise the additional funds?

Answers: Commercial lease and severance tax.
Through long term bonds.
Sales tax.

Comments: "It will take more money for improving vocational education. While I support more money for education, I don't favor earmarking a tax for vocational education."
"This is a necessary program."
"This field has been neglected too long."
"State will benefit greatly from this program."
"Yes, unless bureaucratic cost is eliminated."
"This is necessary to train skilled workers."
"I question pre-vocational training."
"Yes, if ADA funds are not divided or prorated between vocational and regular classroom."
"The vocational should be abandoned and made a part of the regular high school program."

9. Do you favor one comprehensive school system for each county in Tennessee?
Yes 34 No 22 No answer 9

Comments: "Depends on the size of the county."
"No. Prefer neighborhood schools."
"Yes. Both academic and vocational."

10. Are you familiar with the community school concept?
Yes 24 No 29 No answer 12
If Yes, are you in favor of financing one for Tennessee?
Yes 21 No 3 No answer 40

Comments: None.

11. What do you think is a fair salary for a teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Tennessee?
$8,000. 10 $10,000. 15 $12,000. 19
More than 5 Less than 0 No answer 16

Comments: "Should be left up to local school boards and county governments."
"This should be based on quality of teaching."

"For new teachers K-6 average of $6,000 per year, 7-12 average of $8,000 per year."
"Whatever is comparable to equal training and background for industry positions."
"Beginning $10,000 - maximum $20,000 with Master Degree."
"It varies with the teacher."
"Starting at $10,000 - topping out at $15,000."
"There is no one salary fair for all, depends on location and qualifications of teachers."
"Based on ability to teach."
"Approximately 20% greater than present."
"Salary is relative - a fair salary is one that will attract good teachers and retain them and permit them to live a good life."
"Depends on qualification."
"A sliding scale based on experience and educational qualifications."
"One that is commensurate with educational preparation, duties and the constantly expanding cost of living."
"At the present time teachers are receiving reasonable compensation."
"$9,000 base with B.A. or B.S., ranging up to $13,000 to $14,000 for special skills, merit and responsibilities."
"Totally merit and performance oriented."
"I believe the salary should be commensurate if possible with similar educational and experience requirements of private industry."
"At least as much as the average for such teachers in the other Southeastern U.S."
"$10,000 and the teacher should be competent."

12. Do you think salaries for teachers in K-12 should be brought in line with those in higher education?
Yes 42 No 9 No answer 14

Comments: "Provided the skills and training are the same."
"Yes. If qualified."
"Yes. Depends on training."
"Yes. To the extent of qualification."
"Yes. For the teacher having the ability."
"Only if qualifications are same."
"Should be based on ability and training."
"In some cases."

"They are fairly equal now in metropolitan areas."
"Yes with local funds."
"If they meet the same qualifications."
"For those with the same certifications."
"Should be decided on merit competency."
"Yes. More than at present."
"No. Do not require the same degree of training."
"Yes. If qualified."
"Yes. If the necessary qualifications are met."
"Yes. But kindergarten should be abandoned."

13. Do you think that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised?
Yes 58 No [illegible] No answer 5

Comments: "Increased emphasis needs to be placed on the basics, reading for example."
"More classes."
"Should reflect more individualism."
"Again too much duplication of courses."

14. Do you think that the commissioner of education should be elected by the people in Tennessee?
Yes 25 No 39 No answer 1

Comments: "Without further knowledge, it would be my opinion that an elected commissioner would not be in the best interests of the state."
"Maybe."
"Worth considering."
"Depends on the quality of the individuals serving."
"Although I'm not sure that he should be replaced with each new administration - there should be more continuity programs, policies, etc., than to start new every four years."
"Absolutely not."

15. Do you think that school board members should have a minimum of 12 years of school?
Yes 46 No 19 No answer

Comments: "The president of the United States does not have to have one."

16. Do you think that school superintendents should be appointed by the school boards?
Yes 40 No 19 No answer 6

Comments: "Yes, unless they are elected."
"Yes - instead of being elected - the superintendent should have to answer to the board - this is not always the case when he or she has been elected."
"The area I represent does not think he should be appointed."
"It is purely my personal opinion that the best system of selection is an elected county school board who, in turn, would hire a county superintendent of schools."
"Yes, if school board elected - if not, no."
"Yes, if county school board elected."
"It doesn't matter - its political either way."
"Depends on the county."
"In some larger towns; not in rural counties."
"No, by the people."
"This is being discussed now in some counties, sounds like pretty good idea."
"Yes, but most people down my way thinks he should be elected."
"No, and I don't think Education should be funded with tax on tobacco or cigarettes."
"Lord No."
"No, if the school board is appointed by the county court."
"Yes, if the school board is elected by the people."
"Appointed yes, but not necessarily by the school board."

17. Should the tenure law in Tennessee be repealed?
Yes 16 No 40 No answer 9

Comments: "Revised."
"Cannot improve Education."
"Only to the extent of replacing poor teachers."

18. At what age should a teacher be required to retire?
55 years 0 60 years 10 65 years 48
No answer 7

Comments: "Depends on ability.'
"After 30 years of service."
"65 years with 30 years of service."
"60 years with 30 years of service."
"60 years with adequate retirement."
"65 years depending on ability."

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

One hundred thirty-two responses were requested and eighty-eight were answered (68 percent).

Solid agreement is registered by all groups on the question of whether children today get a better education than their parents did. The answer is "better" by a substantial margin. Those who are in a position to be best informed - those parents who have one or more children in the public schools - vote more than 3 to 1 that schools are better today than in their time. Even those who report that in recent years their attitudes have become less favorable are still inclined to say that the schools are better than they were when they attended.[3]

Seventy-five percent of the members of the 89th General Assembly interviewed feel that the quality of education has improved over the past ten years in Tennessee, however, there are 25 percent of those who feel that it has not improved in certain areas of the state.

Fifty percent of the members interviewed do not think that the taxpayers in Tennessee are getting their money's worth for the amount being spent on education in the state.

Sixty-one percent of the members interviewed feel that too much emphasis is being placed on higher education.

Fifty-seven percent of the members interviewed do favor subsidizing private colleges through student grants.

[3]Elam, "Fifth Annual Poll" ibid., p. 169.

In a survey conducted by the University of Tennessee Communications Research Center, it was found that in both Tennessee and the U. S., the public believes that a better education can be obtained in private than in state universities.[4]

Seventy-three percent of the members interviewed do favor the graduate school programs in Tennessee as it exists at this time with some minor changes in certain areas.

An overwhelming 65 percent of the members interviewed of the 89th General Assembly thought the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee was the home environment of the child.

Gallup's Third Annual Survey asked a similar question:

> "When some children do poorly in school, some people place the blame on the children, some on the children's home life, some on the school, and some on the teachers. Of course, all of these things share the blame, but where would you place the chief blame?"

The answer given by the greatest percentage of those interviewed: the children's home life. In fact, more than half of the adults interviewed (54%) give this answer. Only 14% name children, 8% teachers, and 6% the schools.[5]

It is significant that parents with children now in the public schools name the child's home life as the chief cause of the student's failure in school; they do not, as might be

[4]Jack B. Haskins, Preliminary Report No. 3, 1974 Statewide Opinion Survey "Comparison of Tennessee Opinions with U. S. and other States' Opinions," (Knoxville, Tenn.: College of Communications, University of Tennessee), p. 6.

[5]Elam, "Third Annual Survey," ibid., p. 94.

expected, shift the responsibility to the teachers nor to the school nor to the children.[6]

Fifty-eight percent of the members interviewed felt the money appropriated by the legislature for the Special Reading Program 74-75 was wisely spent.

Seventy-one percent of the members interviewed feel that no additional tax will be needed to fully implement the Vocational Program in Tennessee. Those who did think it would take more money (25%), proposed raising the additional funds by sales tax, severance tax on minerals, long term bonds and commercial lease tax.

Fifty-nine percent of the members interviewed do favor a Comprehensive School System for each county in Tennessee.

In Gallup's Fifth Annual Poll, few proposals received such overwhelming approval as the suggestion that schools give more emphasis to a study of trades, professions, and business to help students decide on their careers. Nine in 10 persons in all major groups sampled in this survey say they would like to have the schools give more emphasis to this part of the educational program.[7]

Of the 88 members interviewed, only 38 were familiar with the Community School, of this number 31 were in favor of financing one for the State of Tennessee.

[6]Elam, "Third Annual Survey" ibid., pp. 94-95

[7]Elam, "Fifth Annual Poll", ibid., p. 163

Most members interviewed were consistent in their views on a fair salary for teachers with a Bachelor's Degree, they should receive about $10,000 to $12,000 per year, which is somewhat more than the average teacher with a Bachelor's Degree is making in Tennessee at the present time.

Sixty-eight percent of the members interviewed thought that teachers in Grades K-12 should be paid as much as teachers in higher education, if their qualifications were the same.

Eighty-eight percent of the members interviewed thought that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised.

Fifty percent of the members interviewed feel that the Commissioner of Education should be appointed by the Governor, rather than being elected by the people.

Sixty percent of the members interviewed had a similar feeling about the Superintendents of Schools, that they should be appointed by the school board or quarterly court, if these bodies were elected by the people.

Seventy-five percent of the members interviewed feel that school board members should have at least 12 years of formal education.

Thirty-seven percent of the members interviewed still feel that the tenure law should be kept as it is, others feel it needs revising.

Gallup's Fourth Annual Poll found that increasingly, the public disapproves of the idea of tenure for teachers. As the salaries of educators become comparable with those in other fields, as teachers, through their unions and similar organizations, develop more clout, and as the supply of teachers begins to exceed the demand, public pressure to give up tenure will almost certainly intensify.[8]

Seventy percent of the members interviewed agree that 65 years is the age at which teachers should be required to retire in Tennessee.

[8]Elam, "Fourth Annual Poll," ibid., p. 129.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education in the United States is still widely regarded as the royal road to success in life. At the same time, a few clouds are appearing on the horizon; unless those who are interested in the continued strength and well-being of the public schools heed these portents, public education in the state could face a worrisome future.

During the last three decades, the position of the teacher has changed, at least in the way the public regards this profession. In the 1930's and 1940's, teachers were thought to be grossly underpaid public servants who engaged in teaching chiefly because of their dedication to education.

In the struggle to obtain parity with other professions, teachers have been compelled to adopt, in many situations, a militant position. This carries with it obvious dangers. If it means that teachers maneuver themselves into an adversary role vis-à-vis the public, then the public, which controls the purse-strings, has all the advantage.[9]

The press is set up to report events, and the more traumatic are more likely to reach the front page. Usually the good news will go neglected unless school administrators themselves take the trouble to find it and see that it is dealt with in an interesting and informative manner. In fact, most newspapers

[9]Elam, "The First Five Years," ibid., p. 4

welcome this kind of help, since few of them can afford to hire educational experts for their news staffs and since few reporters spend the time it takes to dig up interesting articles. The costs to the school of providing this kind of information are entirely justifiable. Taxpayers have every right to know what they are getting for their money, especially in a time when educational costs are constantly increasing, and this cannot be achieved by neglecting to tell the positive side of what the schools are doing.[10]

[10]Elam, "The First Five Years," ibid., p. 6

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Schedule Showing Original Budget Proposals and Appropriations Added by the Senate and House. Senate-House Conference Committee, 89th General Assembly, State of Tennessee 1975. (Mimeographed)

Schedule Showing Proposed Budget Reductions Assuming No Taxes, and Taxes Amounting to $15,500,000. and $37,357,000. Senate-House Conference Committee, 89th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, 1975. (Mimeographed)

Schedule Showing Comparison of Revenue Requirements and Proposed Budget Reductions and Adjustments. Senate-House Conference Committee, 89th General Assembly, State of Tennessee, 1975. (Mimeographed)

SUMMARY

A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF MEMBERS OF THE TENNESSEE STATE LEGISLATURE TOWARD PUBLIC EDUCATION IN TENNESSEE

What state legislators think about public education in a state is extremely important to those who want high quality public schools in that state. A survey was conducted in Tennessee to determine the attitudes of members of the 89th General Assembly of Tennessee toward public education in the state. This study helped educators, as well as the Tennessee Education Association, to understand better the thinking of legislators concerning several aspects of public education in Tennessee. The information gleaned from this study will, hopefully, aid educators in their interactions with legislators.

Every member of the 89th General Assembly of Tennessee (33 senators and 99 representatives) was included in this study. Questionnaires were completed and returned by 23 of the 33 senators (69.7 percent) and from 65 of the 99 representatives (65.7 percent). Overall, 132 responses were requested and 88 were received (66.7 percent). The results on several of the more significant questions from the questionnaire will be discussed in the paper. The information is presented as the combined responses of both senators and representatives. A summary of some of the findings of the study appears below.

Some three-fourths (72.7 percent) of the Tennessee legislators expressed that the quality of public education in the state improved over the past ten years. However, it is certainly noteworthy that slightly less than one-fourth of the legislators (22.7 percent) felt public education in Tennessee had not improved during the past ten years (4.6 percent gave no response).

About half of the legislators (48.9 percent) stated that the taxpayers of Tennessee were getting their money's worth from tax dollars spent on public education; however, 45.4 percent felt taxpayers were not receiving what they should from public education for the amount of money spent.

Three-fourths of the legislators (72.7 percent) felt that school board members should be required to have at least twelve years of schooling. One of the 27.3 percent of those opposing stated that a person is not required to have a high school diploma to be president of the United States!

Most Tennessee legislators felt the state tenure law for public school teachers should not be repealed (54.6 percent), but 28.4 percent thought otherwise (17.0 percent did not answer). Over seventy percent of Tennessee's legislators felt that retirement should be mandatory for public school teachers at age 65; while some 15.9 percent chose age 60; and 12.5 did not make a selection.

An analysis of the data of this study indicates that legislators feel generally positive about public education in Tennessee. However, they feel that many improvements need to be made.

Note: The research for this study was completed by Joyce Y. Grissom. The study would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Mr. Shelby A. Rinehart, State Representative from the Thirty-seventh District to the Tennessee Legislature. The design of the study, computations, and writing were done by both of the authors.

Combined Responses of Senators and Representatives

1. Do you believe that the quality of education has improved in Tennessee over the past ten years?

Yes	64	No	20	No Response	4
Percent	72.7	Percent	22.7	Percent	4.6

2. Do you think that the taxpayers of Tennessee are getting their money's worth for the amount of money now being spent on education in the State of Tennessee?

Yes	43	No	40	No Response	5
Percent	48.9	Percent	45.4	Percent	5.7

3. Is too much emphasis now being placed on higher education?

Yes	53	No	33	No Response	2
Percent	60.2	Percent	37.5	Percent	2.3

4. Should the taxpayers of Tennessee subsidize private colleges through student grants?

Yes	52	No	34	No Response	2
Percent	59.1	Percent	38.6	Percent	2.3

5. Do you favor graduate school programs in Tennessee?

Yes	62	No	9	No Response	17
Percent	70.4	Percent	10.2	Percent	19.3

6. Which of the four items listed do you think has been the greatest deterrent to education in Tennessee?

Poor Quality Teachers	3	(3.4 percent)
Busing	25	(28.7 percent)
Home Environment	59	(67.8 percent)
Compulsory Attendance	0	(zero percent)

(one no response)

7. Do you favor one comprehensive school system for each county in Tennessee?

Yes	49	No	29	No Response	10
Percent	55.7	Percent	33.0	Percent	11.4

8. What do you think is a fair salary for a teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Tennessee?

$8,000	10	(11.4 percent)
$10,000	28	(31.8 percent)
$12,000	27	(30.7 percent)
Answer not usable	23	(26.2 percent)

9. Do you think salaries for teachers in grades K-12 should be brought in line with those in higher education?

Yes	58	No	16	No Response	14
Percent	65.9	Percent	18.2	Percent	15.9

10. Do you think that the curriculum for majors in education should be revised?

Yes	78	No	3	No Response	7
Percent	88.6	Percent	3.4	Percent	8.0

11. Do you think that the Commissioner of Education should be elected by the people?

Yes	38	No	49	No Response	1
Percent	43.2	Percent	55.7	Percent	1.1

12. Do you think that school board members should have a mimimum of twelve years of schooling?

Yes	64	No	24	No Response	0
Percent	72.7	Percent	27.3	Percent	0

13. Do you think that school superintendents should be appointed by the school board?

Yes	53	No	28	No Response	7
Percent	60.2	Percent	31.8	Percent	8.0

14. Should the tenure law in Tennessee be repealed?

Yes	25	No	48	No Response	15
Percent	28.4	Percent	54.6	Percent	17.0

15. At what age should a teacher be required to retire in Tennessee?

age	number	percent
55	0	0
60	14	15.9
65	63	71.6

no response 11